

# MIAMI BEACH

OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

NO. LTC #

167-2016

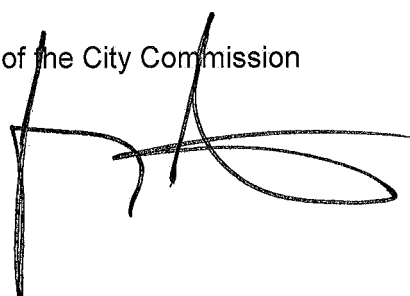
## LETTER TO COMMISSION

TO: Mayor Philip Levine and Members of the City Commission

FROM: Jimmy L. Morales, City Manager

DATE: April 19, 2016

SUBJECT: Floatopia



The purpose of this Letter to Commission is to provide information regarding the events this past Saturday related to the non-sanctioned social media event Floatopia. As you know, Floatopia started coming to Miami Beach in September 2012, and typically has been convened on social media twice a year in April and September. Historically, participants would gather on the beach in the early afternoon between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> streets. One year ago, there were serious litter issues at the event that led to a concerted event action plan by the City for last September's event. Enhanced staffing and coordination with the County's beach crews helped address many of the issues.

Once the group announced they would be coming to Miami Beach on April 16<sup>th</sup> of this year, we began planning for dealing with the impacts. Contrary to some statements on social media, we were prepared for the type and size of event that we had seen in the past, and in fact even augmented our resources for safe measure. These preparations included:

- Increasing the Police staffing from 18 to 29 officers, including the addition of additional posts, two additional officers to patrol the south of 5<sup>th</sup> Street neighborhood; two officers to man our two Skywatch towers and one officer to monitor real time cameras in the patrol's command center.
- In response to previous complaints that some participants buried coolers of beer in the sand the night before the last Floatopia, two ATV units were specifically assigned to a detail on the beach the night before.
- Police checkpoints from South Pointe to 5<sup>th</sup> street at the entrances to the beach, checking for alcohol, glass, and styrofoam, among other things.
- Police working in overtime capacity from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- Double staffing of the lifeguard towers, plus deployment of the Ocean Rescue boat, wave runners and two Police boats. At the request of Police, the Coast Guard also deployed two vessels.
- Enhanced Code staffing, consisting of a dedicated beach detail team of 5 officers and one administrator.
- A fire rescue unit on the hard pack between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> streets.
- Enhanced City Sanitation staffing with 5 additional team members working

solely in the affected area from 1 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

- Three overtime Parking units assigned to enforce south of Fifth.
- Enhanced Park Rangers staffing for South Pointe Park and Marjory Stoneman Douglas Park.
- Enhanced County beach maintenance staffing with additional equipment and four additional ground crew members from 5:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- Enhanced Parks staffing, consisting of an additional four person team to assist with litter from 5 to 10 p.m., and dedicated porters at the bathrooms.
- 12 Goodwill ambassadors and deployment of security guards.
- 30 special event trash boxes to complement existing litter cans on the sand and a 30 cubic yard dumpster east of the dunes to collect floats.

We also engaged in significant social media outreach to educate possible participants on keeping our beaches clean and free of litter, glass, styrofoam and other objects, as well as letting them know not to park in residential areas from which they would be towed.

Unfortunately, as has been reported, no one predicted the massive turnout that occurred on Saturday. We estimate that 100,000 people attended (probably 10 times larger than previous Floatopia crowds). The event stretched from the South Pointe pier to 10<sup>th</sup> street. Folks began arriving early in the morning and by early afternoon, it was clear that this was going to be a much larger event.

In light of this unexpected turnout, we made some real time adjustments to our plan. These included holding over the afternoon Police shift and bringing 10 officers from the midnight shift in early so that we would have significant police coverage at the end of the day. The officers that were assigned to Floatopia were held over another 2.5 hours. Sanitation held over some of its crews so that we had an additional seven employees assigned to beach cleanup at the end of the day, as well as planned on having an additional twenty workers the next morning. Needless to say, despite these adjustments, our resources were strained by the massive crowds.

Like we did during spring break, the plan was to, on a block by block basis, sweep the beachgoers off the beach in the late afternoon (encouraging them to take their garbage with them) and then have County and City sanitation crews come in behind and clean up. Nature, however, did not cooperate, and it rained heavily towards the end of the day. This caused a mass exodus from the beach, and significant trash was left behind, including many floats. The mass exodus also aggravated the traffic problems since all the cars that came to the beach over the course of the day were now leaving at one time (plus an accident with injuries at the west end of the MacArthur that made matters worse). The heavy rains (twice that night) also impacted our beach clean-up efforts.

City and County cleanup crews worked until 11 p.m. Saturday night on the beach, and then again Sunday morning starting around 6 a.m. This included cleaning out the dunes from materials that were either carried in by the winds or dumped there by the beachgoers. By 10 a.m. on Sunday, the entire stretch from South Pointe pier to 10<sup>th</sup> street was clean and sifted. To further evidence the difference in scale from past events, the City sanitation department removed nine 30 cubic yard containers worth of litter manually collected on the beach (compared to only three containers worth of litter at the

last event), and that does not include any litter mechanically removed by the County in its lifts and trucks.

From a public safety perspective, there were only two arrests on the sand, and one more on Ocean Drive during the exodus. The shooting at 12<sup>th</sup> and Washington was not related to the Floatopia event. Ocean rescue was busy, with 210 victims rescued from the rough surf. Calls for Police response nearly doubled, but our force was able to handle the volume. Code and Police also worked together to shut down an illegal "official Floatopia party" that had been advertised on social media by one of the hotels on Ocean Drive.

Unfortunately, there is no denying that the South of Fifth neighborhood was severely impacted by this event, including the behavior of some of the participants as they walked back to their cars and left garbage in the street or on the sidewalks. The automobile exodus at day's end created a major traffic snarl across South Beach. And the cost to taxpayers of the City's efforts to mitigate these impacts is significant and is in no way offset by any tax revenues since these beachgoers simply drive in and drive out.

As directed by the Mayor and the Commission, I will be preparing a report for the April 27<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting with suggestions on how to prevent this from happening again. I will work with staff and the Law Department to put together a set of proposals that we believe will be most effective in dealing with high impact beach events that include not only Floatopia, but also spring break and other times when we witness huge crowds on the beach. I look forward to that discussion next week.